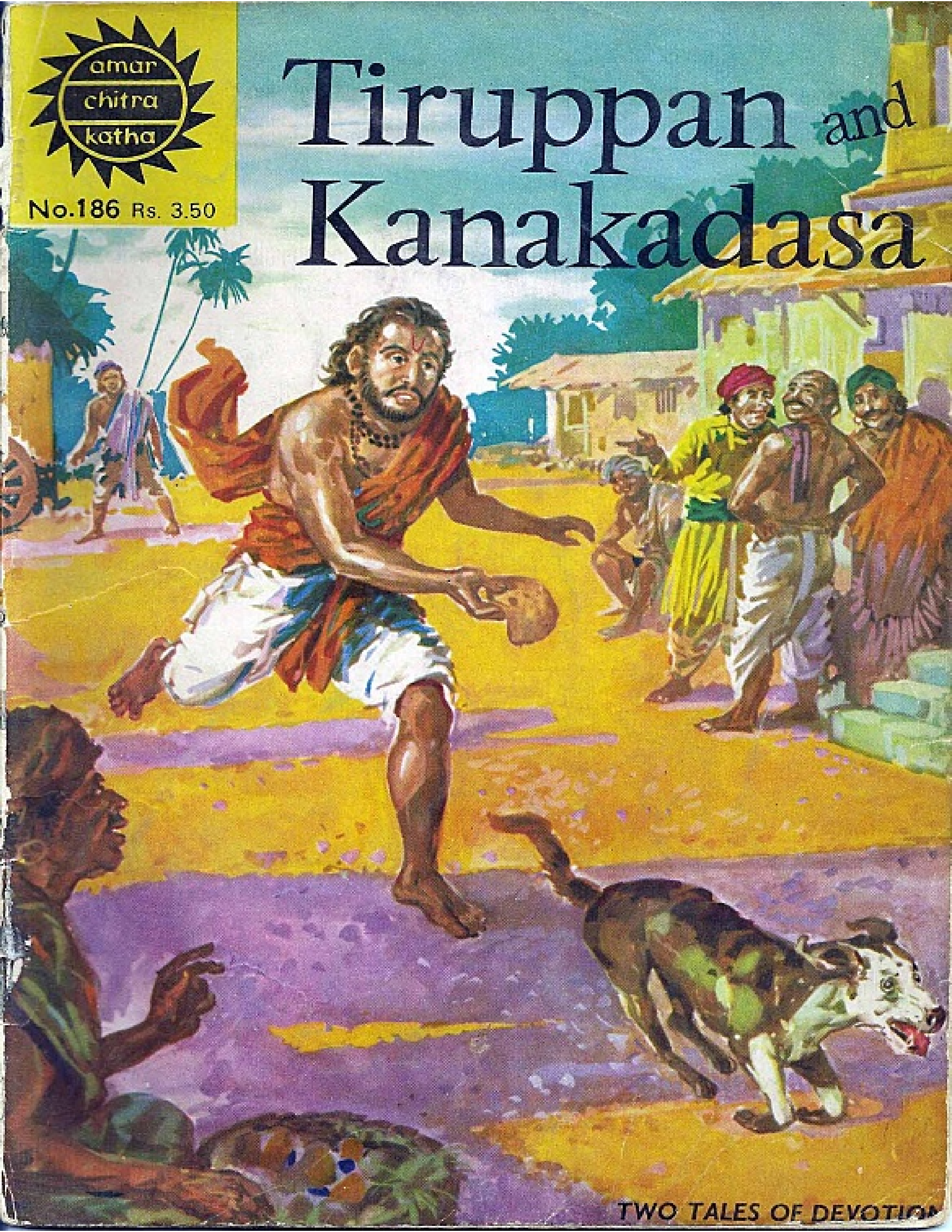
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Tiruppan and Kanakadasa



TWO TALES OF DEVOTIO

Even as early as the time of the Buddha, Hinduism was already vitiated by the hierarchy (stratification) of the caste system. Orthodox Hindus felt that God would be defiled by the prayers offered by people belonging to the so-called lower castes and denied them the right to enter temples.

The caste system is still a blot on Hindu society despite the relentless campaigns carried on against it by enlightened social reformers and thinkers through the ages.

In the two tales recounted here, we have God Himself in the role of reformer, acknowledging the devotion of two lowly devotees, Tiruppan and Kanakadasa. The Lord's grace elevated both of them.

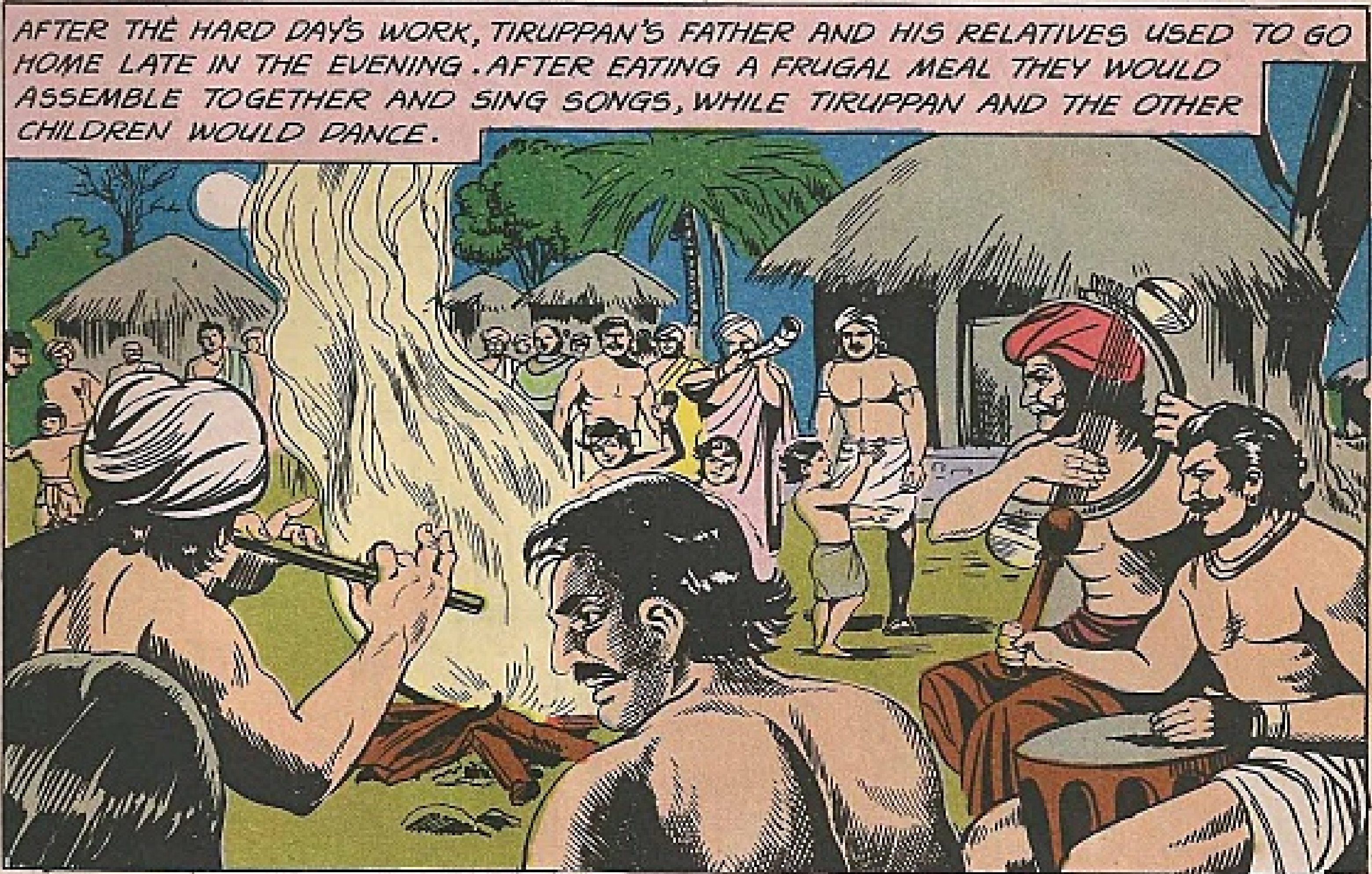
According to modern scholars, Tiruppan, the last of the twelve Alvars (Vaishnava saints), lived in Tamil Nadu in the 9th century; and Kanakadasa, in Karnataka, in the 16th century. Only ten Tamil verses of Tiruppan have come down to us. Though Kanakadasa is better known for his devotional songs in Kannada, he is also the author of three *kavyas* (long poems) on the lives of Krishna, Rama and Nala, and of a philosophical work, *Hari Bhakti Sara.* All four works were composed in Kannada.

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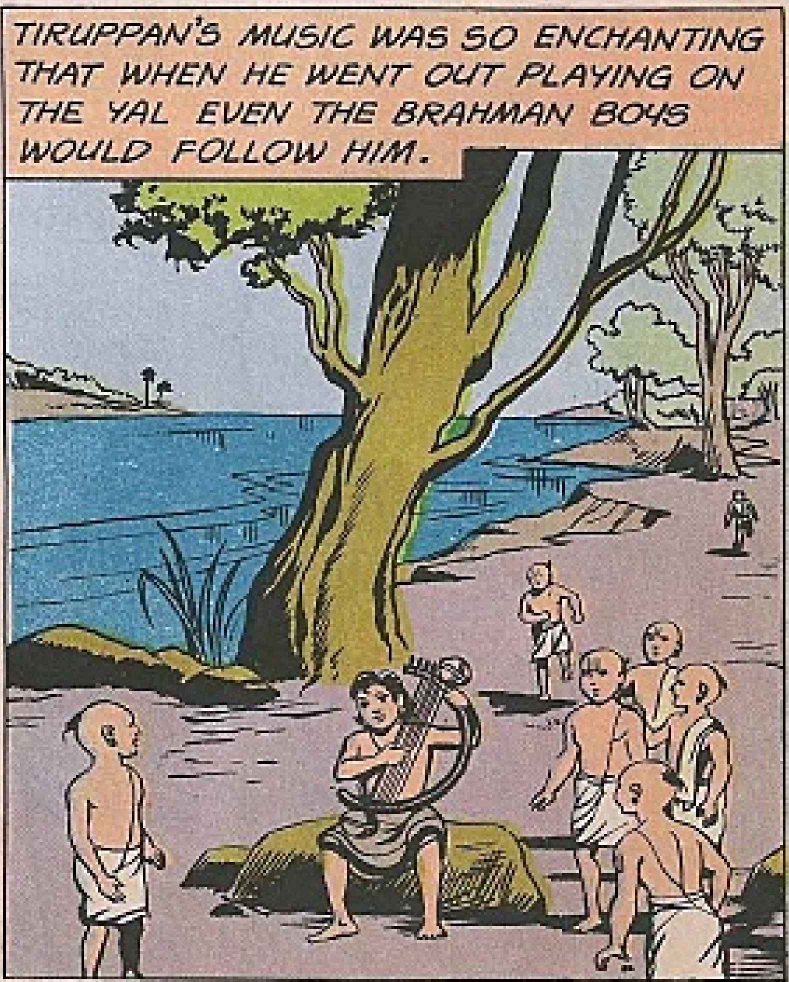
Editor : Anant Pai   Script : Subba Rao   Artworks : S. Nageswara Rao


TIRUPPAN
THE ROAD TO SRIRANGAM, THE HOLY CITY OF LORD RANGANATHA, WAS CROWDED WITH PILGRIMS WHO WERE ON THEIR WAY TO ATTEND THE FESTIVAL HELD THERE EVERY YEAR.
A CHILD HAD BEEN ABANDONED BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD AND ITS PITEOUS CRIES MADE A FEW PILGRIMS PAUSE FOR A WHILE.
MOTHER, HE IS BEAUTIFUL! CAN WE TAKE HIM HOME?
HUSH. DON'T GO NEAR HIM!
DON'T TOUCH HIM!
FOR ALL WE KNOW HE MAY BE AN UNTOUCHABLE.
YES.
AND THEY WENT ON WITH THEIR JOURNEY.


AT LAST A SWEEPER CAME BY.
HE PICKED UP THE CHILD ...
POOR LITTLE THING! YOU MUST BE HUNGRY. DON'T CRY! I WILL TAKE YOU HOME.
...AND TOOK IT TO HIS HOME ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY WHERE PEOPLE OF HIS COMMUNITY LIVED.
YOU HAVE BEEN PRAYING FOR A SON. GOD HAS SENT YOU ONE. HERE, TAKE HIM.
THE CHILD GREW UP UNDER THE LOVING CARE OF HIS FOSTER-PARENTS. THEY NAMED HIM TIRUPPAN.
LOOK, TIRUPPAN WANTS TO HELP YOU.


AFTER THE HARD DAY'S WORK, TIRUPPAN'S FATHER AND HIS RELATIVES USED TO GO HOME LATE IN THE EVENING. AFTER EATING A FRUGAL MEAL THEY WOULD ASSEMBLE TOGETHER AND SING SONGS, WHILE TIRUPPAN AND THE OTHER CHILDREN WOULD DANCE.

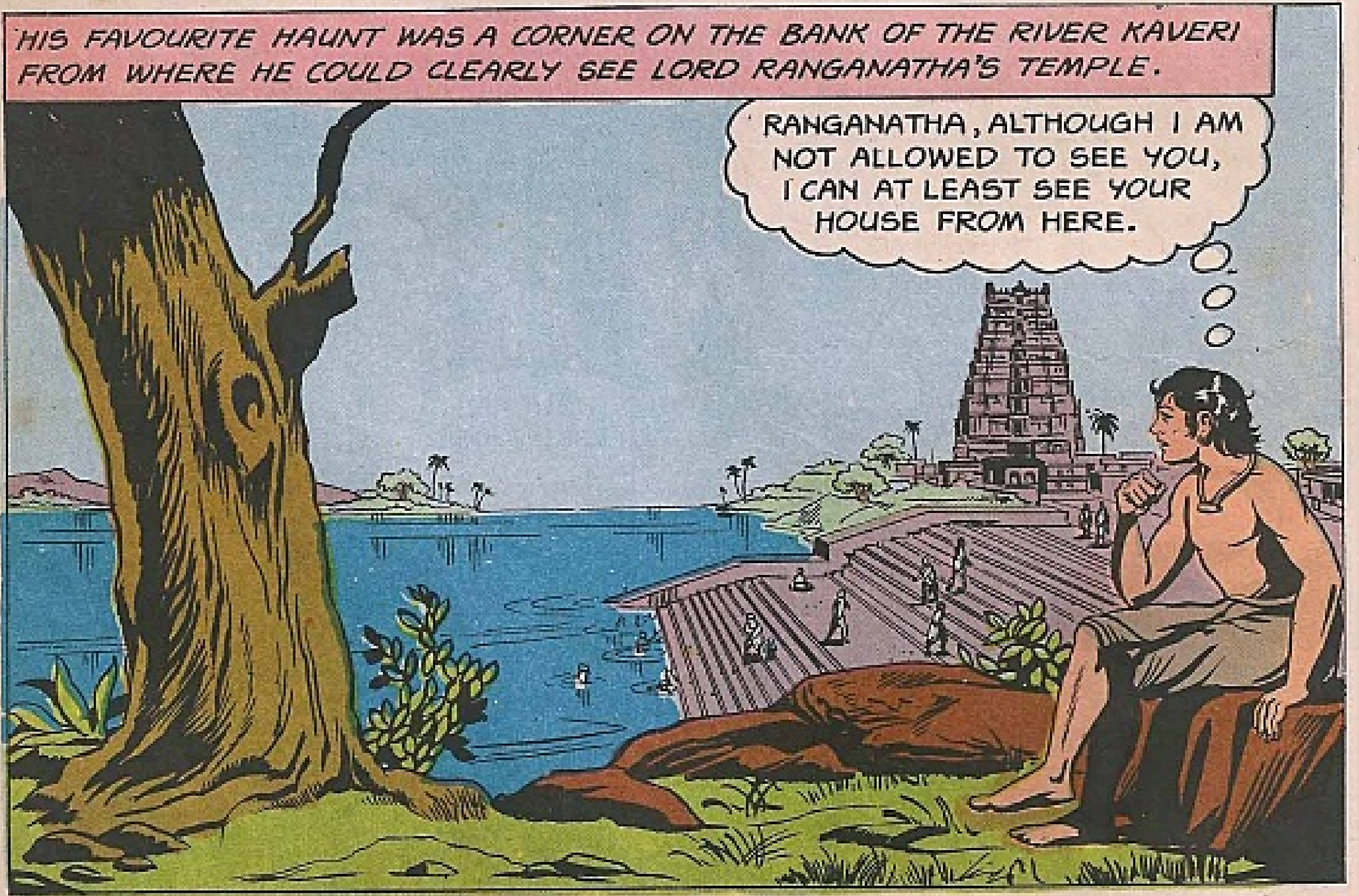

TIRUPPAN LEARNT TO PLAY ON THE YAL, WHICH IS A KIND OF STRINGED INSTRUMENT.

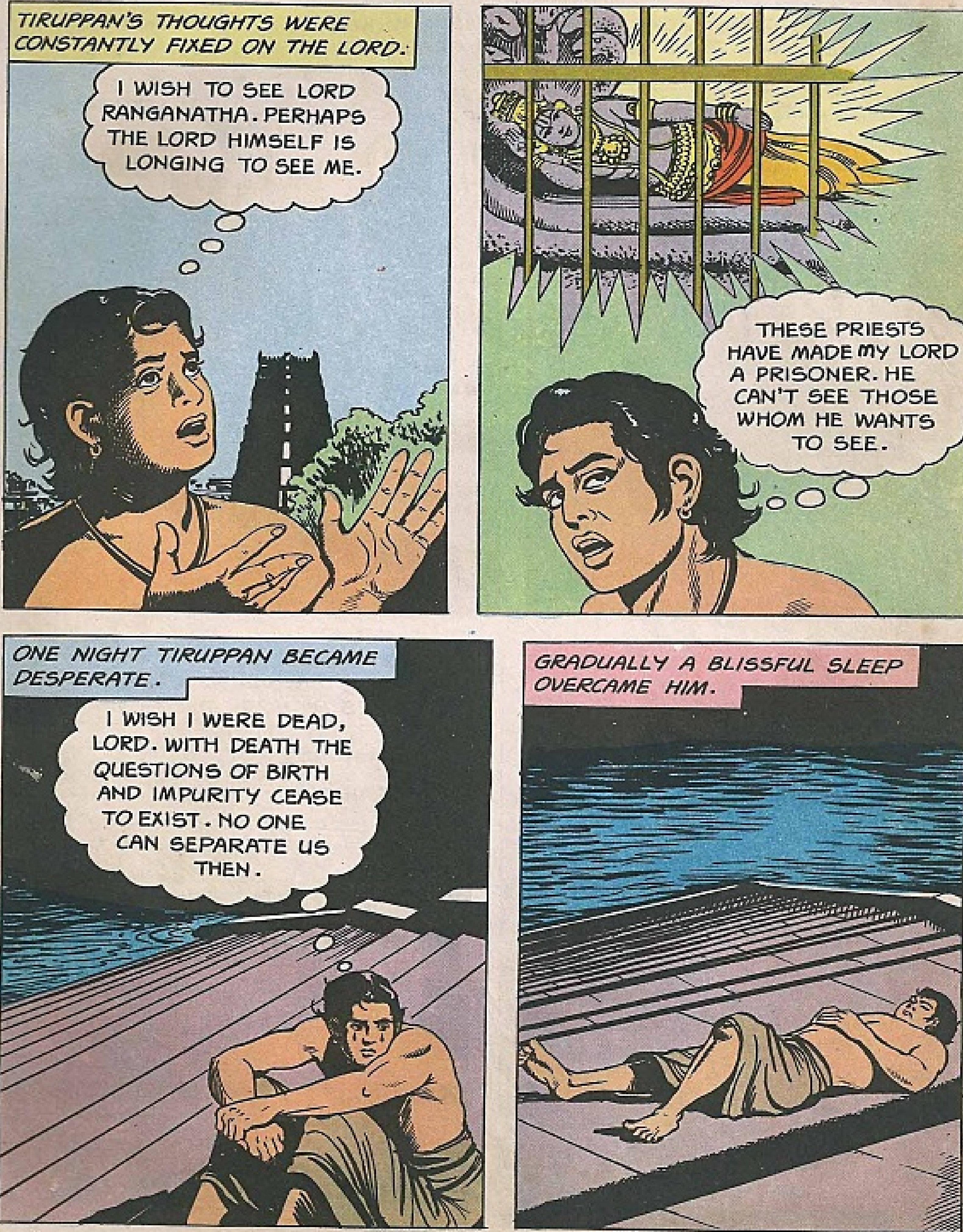

TIRUPPAN'S MUSIC WAS SO ENCHANTING THAT WHEN HE WENT OUT PLAYING ON THE YAL EVEN THE BRAHMAN BOYS WOULD FOLLOW HIM.


TIRUPPAN USED TO ACCOMPANY HIS FATHER WHOSE JOB IT WAS TO KEEP THE SURROUNDINGS OF THE TEMPLE CLEAN.
FATHER, TO WHOM DOES THAT BIG BEAUTIFUL HOUSE BELONG?
IT BELONGS TO LORD RANGANATHA.
MOTHER, WHO IS RANGANATHA? HE HAS SUCH A BIG HOUSE. IS HE A VERY RICH MAN?
THE WHOLE WORLD BELONGS TO HIM. HE IS THE FATHER OF ALL.
I WANT TO SEE LORD RANGANATHA. I WONDER WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE.
EARLY ONE MORNING, TIRUPPAN WENT TO THE TEMPLE.
HEY, STOP! HOW DARE YOU COME THIS FAR!
I WANT TO SEE LORD RANGA-NATHA.

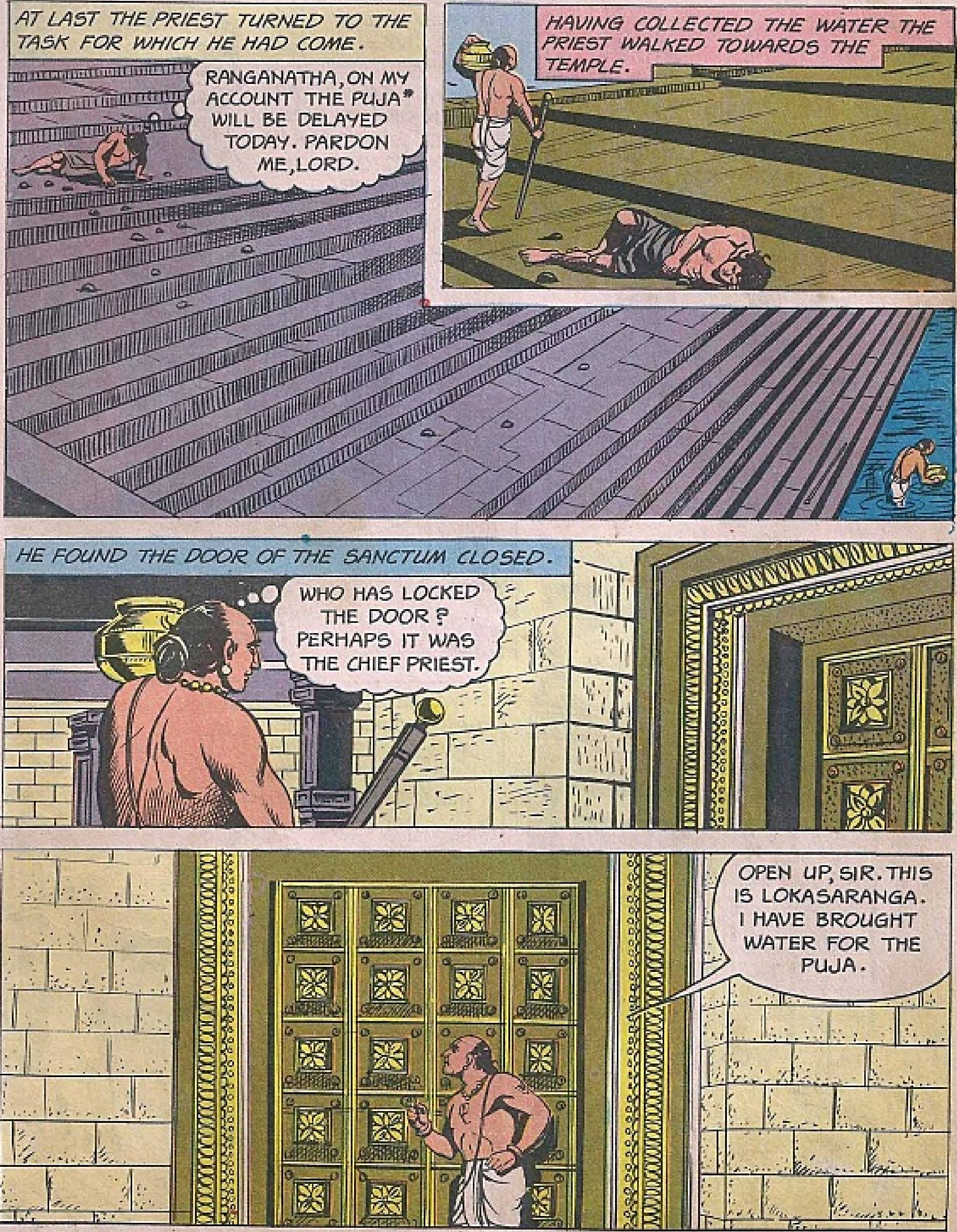

UNTOUCHABLE, DON'T YOU KNOW YOUR PLACE ?
NEVER COME HERE AGAIN!
HUMILIATED, TIRUPPAN RAN TO HIS MOTHER.
MOTHER, WHY CAN'T I SEE THE LORD? IS HE NOT THE FATHER OF ALL ?
HE IS, BUT THE PRIESTS WON'T LET US SEE HIM.
CHILD, WHY ARE YOU SO QUIET ? FATHER HAS FINISHED HIS FOOD. YOU HAVEN'T EVEN STARTED EATING.
SOON AFTERWARDS, TIRUPPAN LOST BOTH HIS FOSTER-PARENTS. BUT THE KIND PEOPLE OF SRIRANGAM LOOKED AFTER HIM.
TIRUPPAN, TAKE THIS.


TIRUPPAN, SINGING WITH A YAL IN HAND AND SURROUNDED BY A CROWD, BECAME A COMMON SIGHT IN SRIRANGAM.
THIS YOUNG BOY IS MAD!
BUT HE'S HARMLESS.
WHAT A SWEET VOICE HE HAS!
AND HIS SONGS ARE SO MOVING!


HIS FAVOURITE HAUNT WAS A CORNER ON THE BANK OF THE RIVER KAVERI FROM WHERE HE COULD CLEARLY SEE LORD RANGANATHA'S TEMPLE.
RANGANATHA, ALTHOUGH I AM NOT ALLOWED TO SEE YOU, I CAN AT LEAST SEE YOUR HOUSE FROM HERE.


TIRUPPAN'S THOUGHTS WERE CONSTANTLY FIXED ON THE LORD.
I WISH TO SEE LORD RANGANATHA. PERHAPS THE LORD HIMSELF IS LONGING TO SEE ME.
THESE PRIESTS HAVE MADE MY LORD A PRISONER. HE CAN'T SEE THOSE WHOM HE WANTS TO SEE.
ONE NIGHT TIRUPPAN BECAME DESPERATE.
I WISH I WERE DEAD, LORD. WITH DEATH THE QUESTIONS OF BIRTH AND IMPURITY CEASE TO EXIST. NO ONE CAN SEPARATE US THEN.
GRADUALLY A BLISSFUL SLEEP OVERCAME HIM.

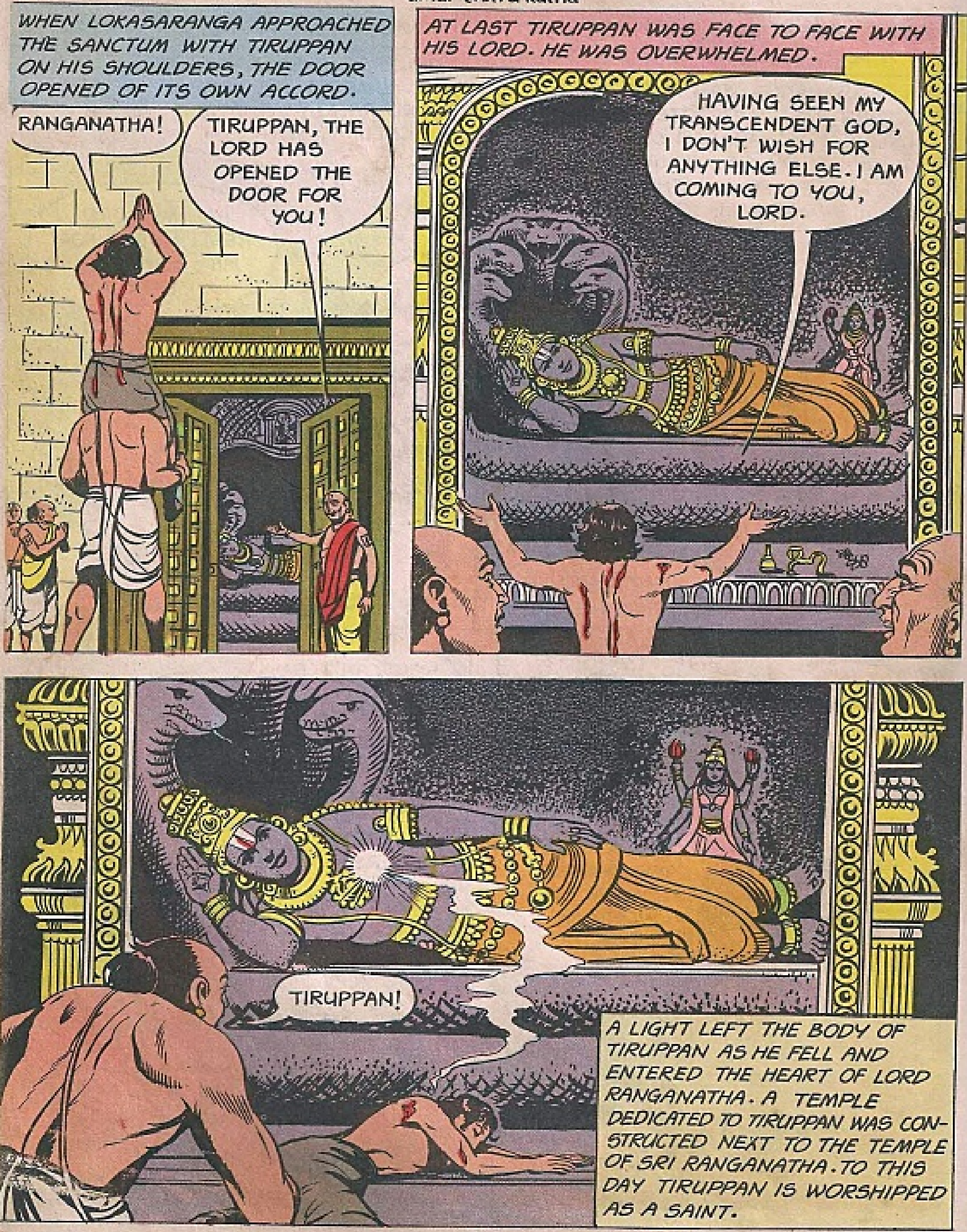

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING LOKASARANGA MUNI, A PRIEST, CAME THERE TO FETCH WATER FOR THE TEMPLE.
WHAT'S THIS? THE UNTOUCHABLE TIRUPPAN BLOCKING THE WAY! GET UP!
TIRUPPAN WAS FAST ASLEEP AND THE ANGRY WORDS OF THE PRIEST FAILED TO WAKE HIM.
YOU INSOLENT UNTOUCHABLE!
THE PRIEST HIT TIRUPPAN ON THE HEAD WITH HIS STICK.
CERTAINLY, THIS WILL WAKE HIM UP!
STILL SMOULDERING WITH ANGER. THE PRIEST SHOWERED A VOLLEY OF STONES ON POOR TIRUPPAN.
RANGANATHA!


AT LAST THE PRIEST TURNED TO THE TASK FOR WHICH HE HAD COME.
RANGANATHA, ON MY ACCOUNT THE PUJA* WILL BE DELAYED TODAY. PARDON ME, LORD.
HAVING COLLECTED THE WATER THE PRIEST WALKED TOWARDS THE TEMPLE.
HE FOUND THE DOOR OF THE SANCTUM CLOSED.
WHO HAS LOCKED THE DOOR? PERHAPS IT WAS THE CHIEF PRIEST.
OPEN UP, SIR. THIS IS LOKASARANGA. I HAVE BROUGHT WATER FOR THE PUJA.

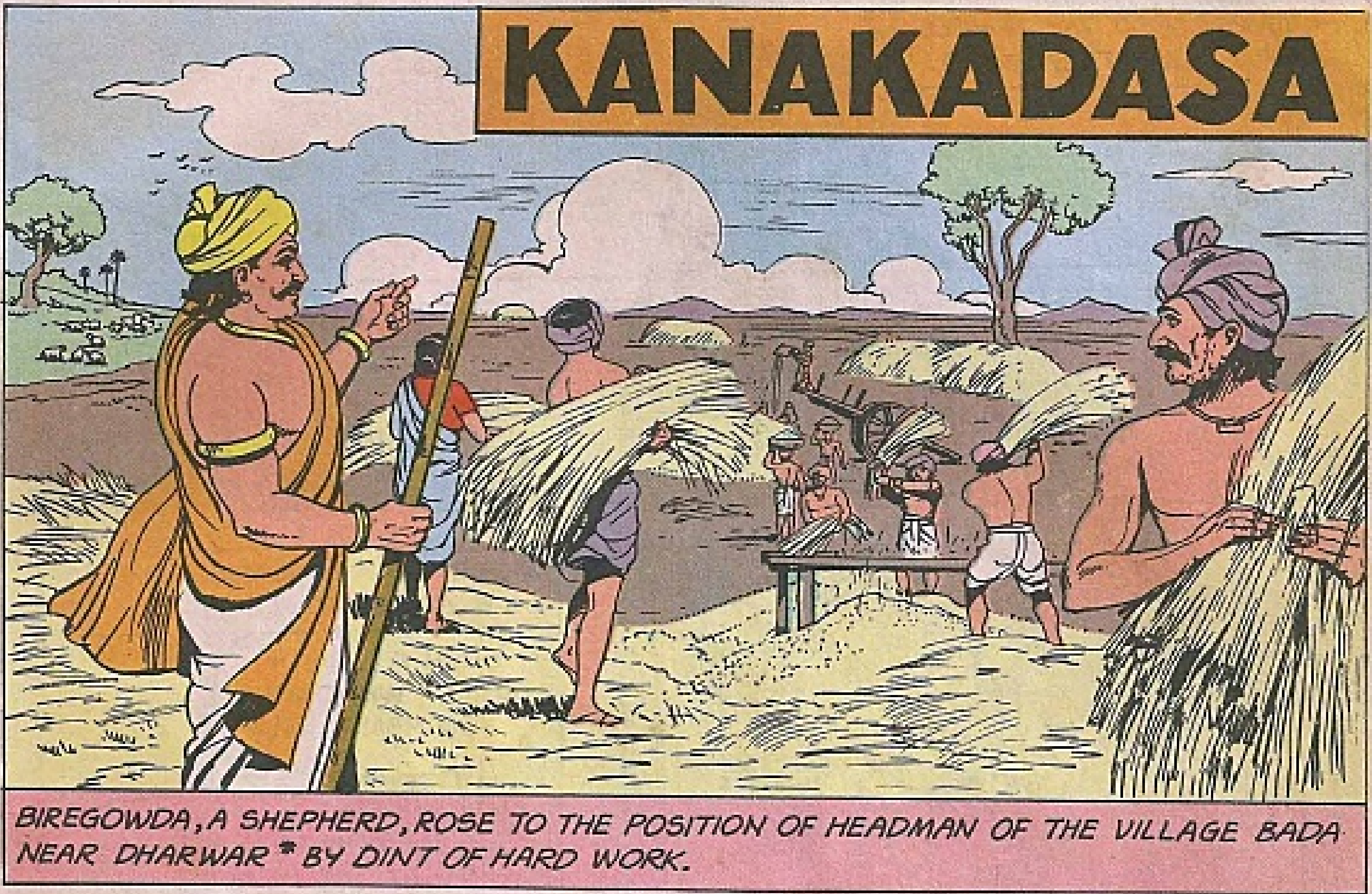
* WORSHIP


LOKASARANGA, WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO?
SIR, I THOUGHT YOU WERE INSIDE THE SANCTUM. SOMEONE HAS LOCKED THE DOOR FROM WITHIN.
THE CHIEF PRIEST CALLED OUT —
WHOEVER YOU ARE, OPEN UP. I AM THE CHIEF PRIEST ASKING YOU TO OPEN THE DOOR.
THERE WAS NO ANSWER.
ALL JOINED TOGETHER AND PUSHED THE DOOR IN AN ATTEMPT TO FORCE IT OPEN.
WHY DOESN'T IT OPEN? IT JUST CAN'T BE LOCKED FROM INSIDE.
MAYBE ONE OF US HAS INCURRED THE DISPLEASURE OF THE LORD AND THE LORD HIMSELF HAS CLOSED THE DOOR.


THE CHIEF PRIEST WAS RIGHT, FOR JUST THEN A VOICE WAS HEARD FROM INSIDE.
LOKASARANGA HAS HURT ME BY HURTING MY DEVOTEE, TIRUPPAN. UNLESS LOKASARANGA CARRIES TIRUPPAN ON HIS SHOULDERS AND GOES ROUND THE TEMPLE, THE DOOR WILL NOT OPEN.
WHAT A SINNER I AM! HURTING THE DEVOTEE OF THE LORD! PARDON ME, LORD.
LOKASARANGA WENT TO TIRUPPAN—
TIRUPPAN, PLEASE PARDON ME. COME TO THE TEMPLE. LORD RANGANATHA IS CALLING YOU.
HAS MY LORD REALLY SENT FOR ME? I AM SO GLAD.
COME ON, TIRUPPAN. I WILL CARRY YOU THERE ON MY SHOULDERS.
YOU, A PRIEST CARRYING ME, A SINNER? NO, YOU CAN'T DO THIS.
YOU CAN'T SAY 'NO' TO THE LORD. IT IS HIS WILL.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND.


WHEN LOKASARANGA APPROACHED THE SANCTUM WITH TIRUPPAN ON HIS SHOULDERS, THE DOOR OPENED OF ITS OWN ACCORD.
RANGANATHA!
TIRUPPAN, THE LORD HAS OPENED THE DOOR FOR YOU!
AT LAST TIRUPPAN WAS FACE TO FACE WITH HIS LORD. HE WAS OVERWHELMED.
HAVING SEEN MY TRANSCENDENT GOD, I DON'T WISH FOR ANYTHING ELSE. I AM COMING TO YOU, LORD.
TIRUPPAN!
A LIGHT LEFT THE BODY OF TIRUPPAN AS HE FELL AND ENTERED THE HEART OF LORD RANGANATHA. A TEMPLE DEDICATED TO TIRUPPAN WAS CONSTRUCTED NEXT TO THE TEMPLE OF SRI RANGANATHA. TO THIS DAY TIRUPPAN IS WORSHIPPED AS A SAINT.

KANAKADASA

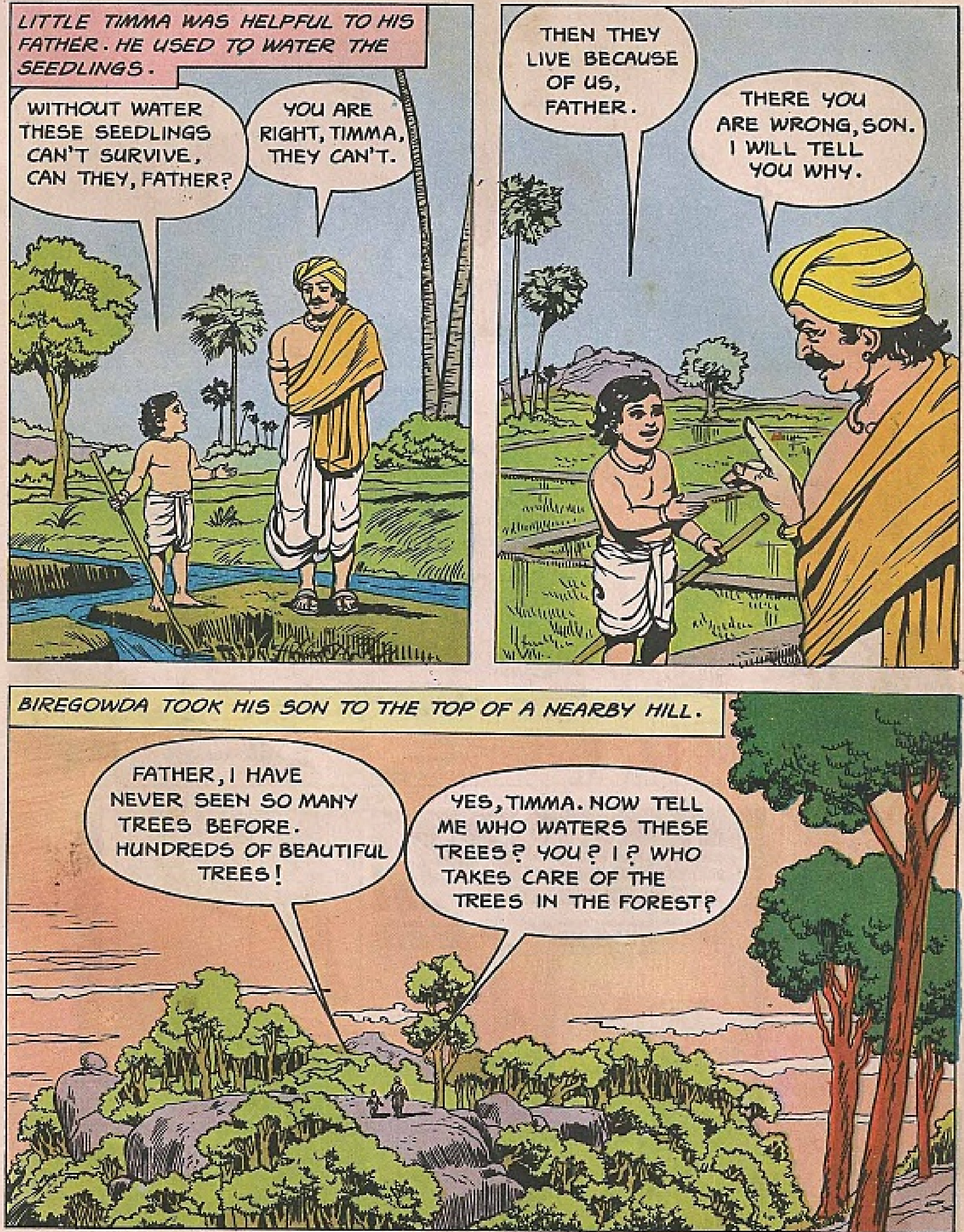


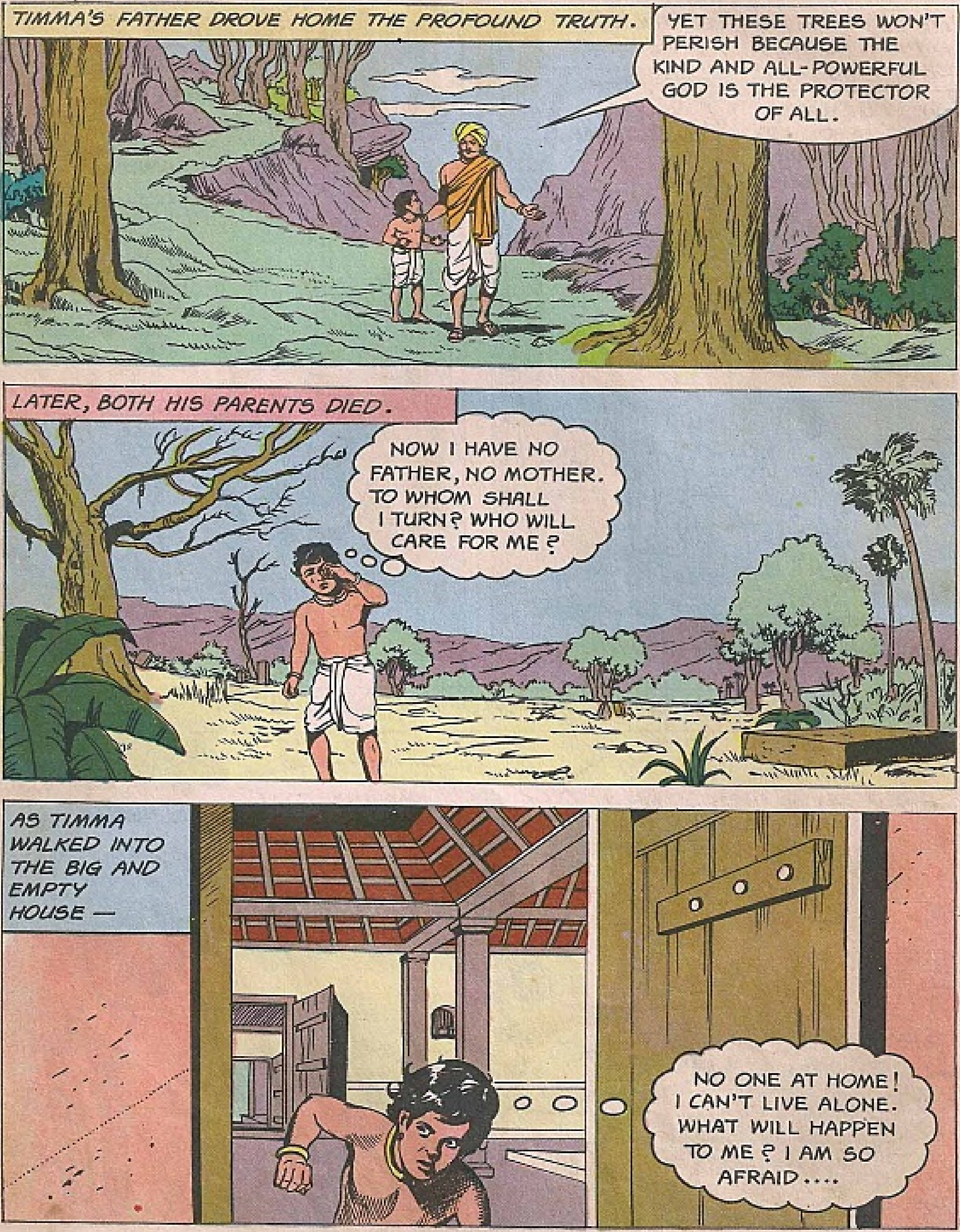


* IN KARNATAKA



* ANOTHER NAME FOR LORD VENKATESHWARA


LITTLE TIMMA WAS HELPFUL TO HIS FATHER. HE USED TO WATER THE SEEDLINGS.
WITHOUT WATER THESE SEEDLINGS CAN'T SURVIVE, CAN THEY, FATHER?
YOU ARE RIGHT, TIMMA, THEY CAN'T.
THEN THEY LIVE BECAUSE OF US, FATHER.
THERE YOU ARE WRONG, SON. I WILL TELL YOU WHY.
BIREGOWDA TOOK HIS SON TO THE TOP OF A NEARBY HILL.
FATHER, I HAVE NEVER SEEN SO MANY TREES BEFORE. HUNDREDS OF BEAUTIFUL TREES!
YES, TIMMA. NOW TELL ME WHO WATERS THESE TREES? YOU? I? WHO TAKES CARE OF THE TREES IN THE FOREST?



TIMMA'S FATHER DROVE HOME THE PROFOUND TRUTH.
YET THESE TREES WON'T PERISH BECAUSE THE KIND AND ALL-POWERFUL GOD IS THE PROTECTOR OF ALL.
LATER, BOTH HIS PARENTS DIED.
NOW I HAVE NO FATHER, NO MOTHER. TO WHOM SHALL I TURN? WHO WILL CARE FOR ME?
AS TIMMA WALKED INTO THE BIG AND EMPTY HOUSE —
NO ONE AT HOME! I CAN'T LIVE ALONE. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME? I AM SO AFRAID....


THEN THE WORDS OF HIS FATHER CAME BACK TO HIM IN A RUSH.
WHO WATERS THESE TREES? YOU? I? WHO TAKES CARE OF THE TREES IN THE FORESTS? YET THESE TREES WON'T PERISH BECAUSE THE KIND AND ALL-POWERFUL GOD IS THE PROTECTOR OF ALL.
NO, I AM NO LONGER AFRAID. GOD KESHAVA* WILL PROTECT ME.
AS HE GREW UP, TIMMA EXHIBITED QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP INHERITED FROM HIS FATHER. AND AN IMPLICIT FAITH IN GOD HELPED HIM TO GROW UP FEARLESS. ONE DAY —
TIMMA, THESE PEOPLE ARE FROM THE NEXT VILLAGE.
WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
WE ARE BEING MENACED BY A TIGER. THREE LIVES HAVE BEEN LOST SO FAR.
DON'T WORRY. I WILL GO WITH YOU AT ONCE.

* KRISHNA


IN THE FOREST —
TIMMA SHOT THE TIGER WITH HIS ARROW AND RID THE VILLAGE OF THE MENACE.
ONE DAY HE WAS DIGGING IN THE BACKYARD OF HIS HOUSE.
WHAT'S THAT? IT LOOKS LIKE AN IRON BOX!
WHEN HE OPENED THE BOX —
GOLD!


THE NEIGHBOURS CAME TO SEE THE TREASURE.
SO MUCH KANAKA!*
SINCE YOU FOUND THE KANAKA WE WILL CALL YOU KANAKA.
WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH ALL THIS GOLD?
I WILL USE IT TO BUILD A TEMPLE, A HOUSE FOR GOD. IT WILL BENEFIT MANY PEOPLE.
HE STARTED THE CONSTRUCTION OF A TEMPLE FOR LORD KESHAVA IN THE NEARBY VILLAGE OF KAGINELE.

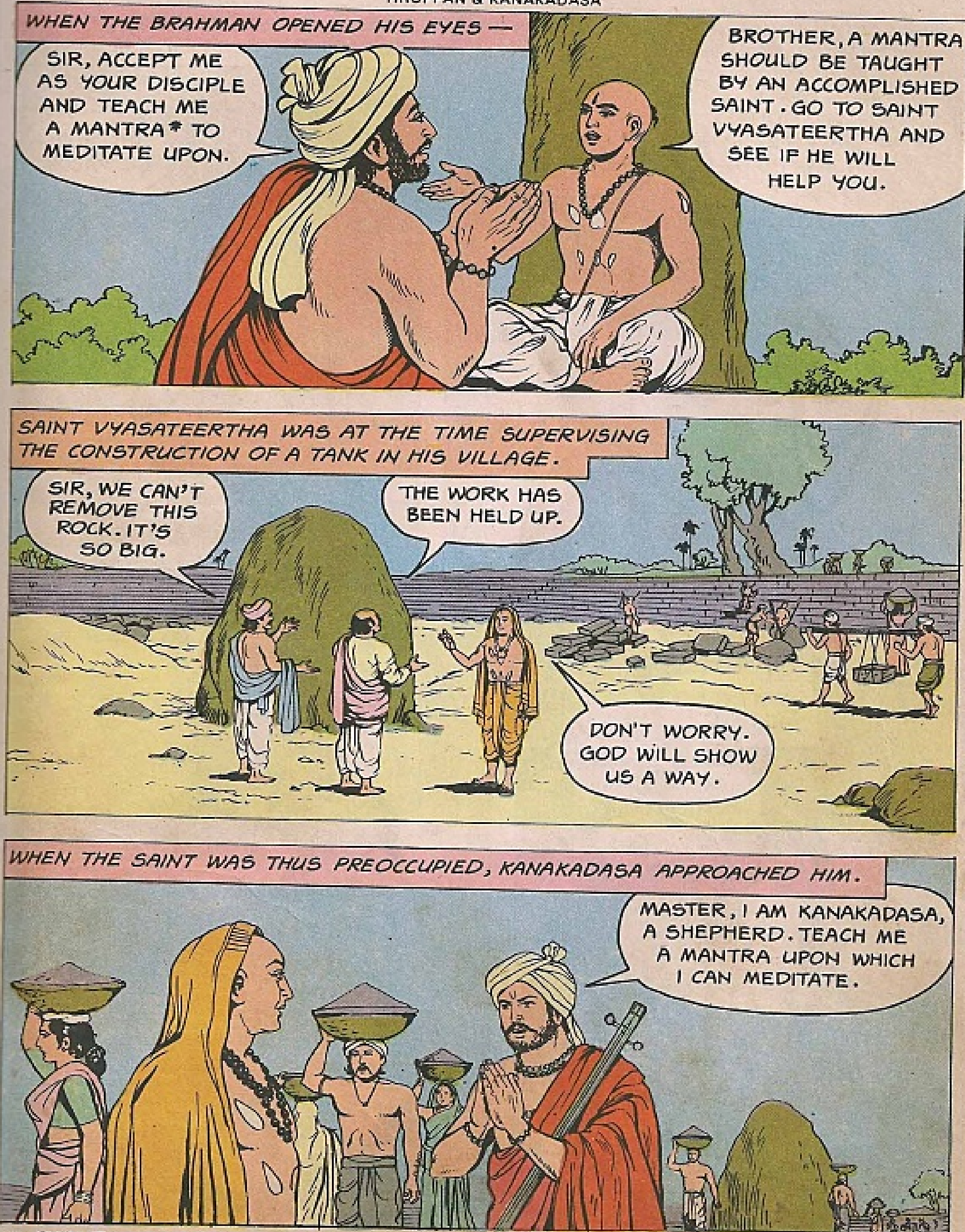
* GOLD


HARDLY HAD THE TEMPLE BEEN COMPLETED WHEN HE WAS CALLED UPON TO TAKE PART IN A BATTLE. THE HEADMAN OF A VILLAGE NEAR BY WAS PREPARING TO ATTACK.
KANAKA, WE MUST GET READY FOR THE ENEMY.
THIS TIME WE WILL GIVE HIM SUCH A BEATING THAT HE WON'T DARE TO ATTACK US AGAIN.
LED BY KANAKA, THE YOUNG MEN OF THE VILLAGE WENT TO BATTLE WITH THE INVADER.
THEY FOUGHT FIERCELY.


BUT TOWARDS THE END OF THE BATTLE —
AH!
BY DUSK THE BATTLEFIELD WAS DESERTED EXCEPT FOR THE DEAD AND THE WOUNDED.
I AM ... DYING! THIS ... PAIN IS ... UNBEARABLE, O KESHAVA ... WON'T YOU COME TO MY HELP?
LORD KESHAVA RESPONDED TO HIS CRY FOR HELP.
KESHAVA, YOU ARE SO KIND. BY YOUR VERY PRESENCE MY WOUNDS HAVE HEALED. I EXPERIENCE NEW STRENGTH, MY LORD.



* SERVANT OF GOD


WHEN THE BRAHMAN OPENED HIS EYES —
SIR, ACCEPT ME AS YOUR DISCIPLE AND TEACH ME A MANTRA* TO MEDITATE UPON.
BROTHER, A MANTRA SHOULD BE TAUGHT BY AN ACCOMPLISHED SAINT. GO TO SAINT VYASATEERTHA AND SEE IF HE WILL HELP YOU.
SAINT VYASATEERTHA WAS AT THE TIME SUPERVISING THE CONSTRUCTION OF A TANK IN HIS VILLAGE.
SIR, WE CAN'T REMOVE THIS ROCK. IT'S SO BIG.
THE WORK HAS BEEN HELD UP.
DON'T WORRY. GOD WILL SHOW US A WAY.
WHEN THE SAINT WAS THUS PREOCCUPIED, KANAKADASA APPROACHED HIM.
MASTER, I AM KANAKADASA, A SHEPHERD. TEACH ME A MANTRA UPON WHICH I CAN MEDITATE.

* CHANT

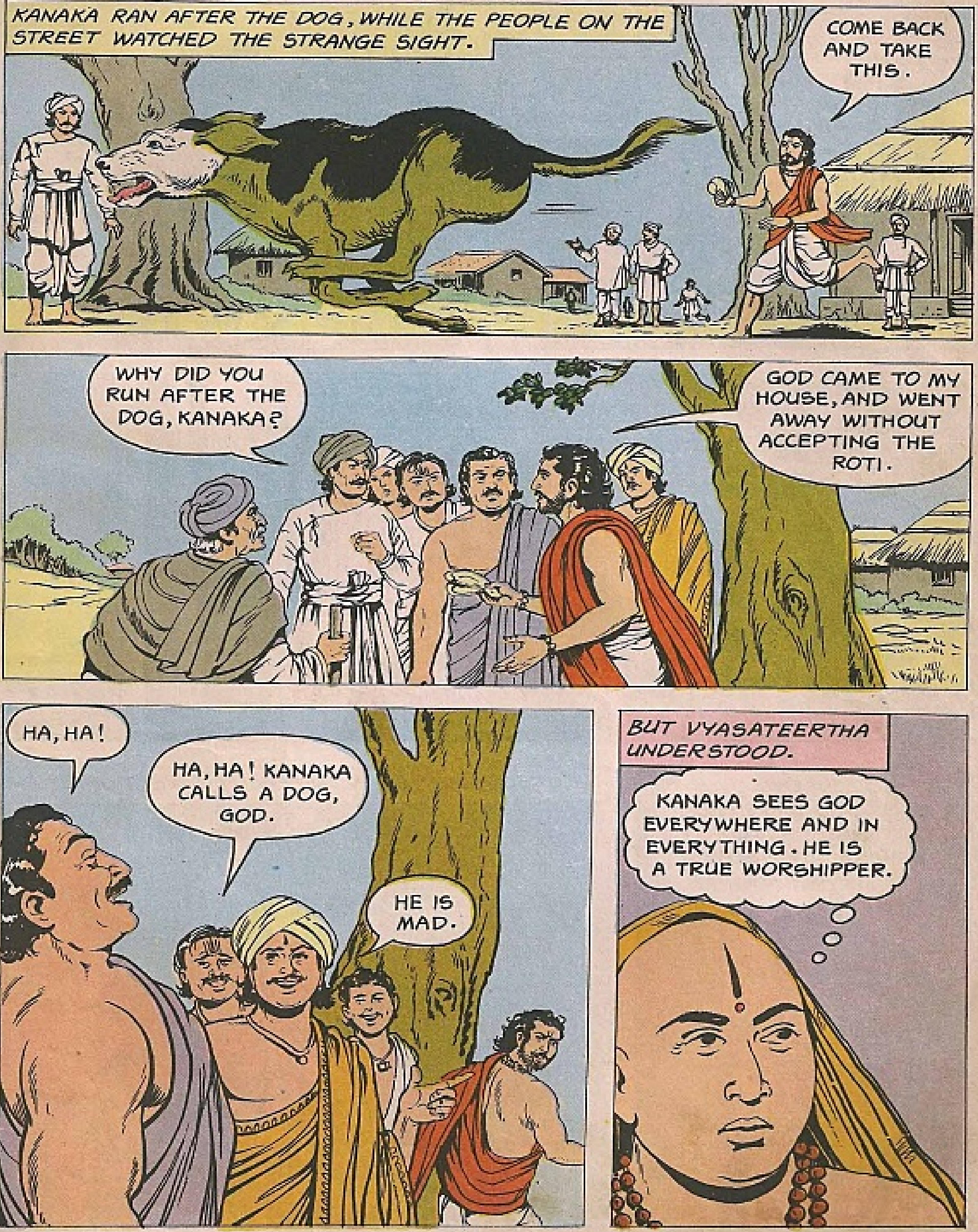

ON HEARING KANAKADASA'S PLEA, SAINT VYASATEERTHA WAS AMUSED.
WHAT COULD A SHEPHERD MEDITATE UPON—SAVE, PERHAPS, SUCH A MANTRA AS "BUFFALO"?
THANK YOU, SIR.
SITTING BESIDE THE ROCK, KANAKADASA BEGAN TO MEDITATE.
BUFFALO! BUFFALO!
A CROWD COLLECTED AROUND KANAKADASA.
HE IS MEDITATING ON "BUFFALO"!
HA, HA!
FOOL!
SUDDENLY A BUFFALO APPEARED.
IT IS YAMA'S* BUFFALO!
RUN!

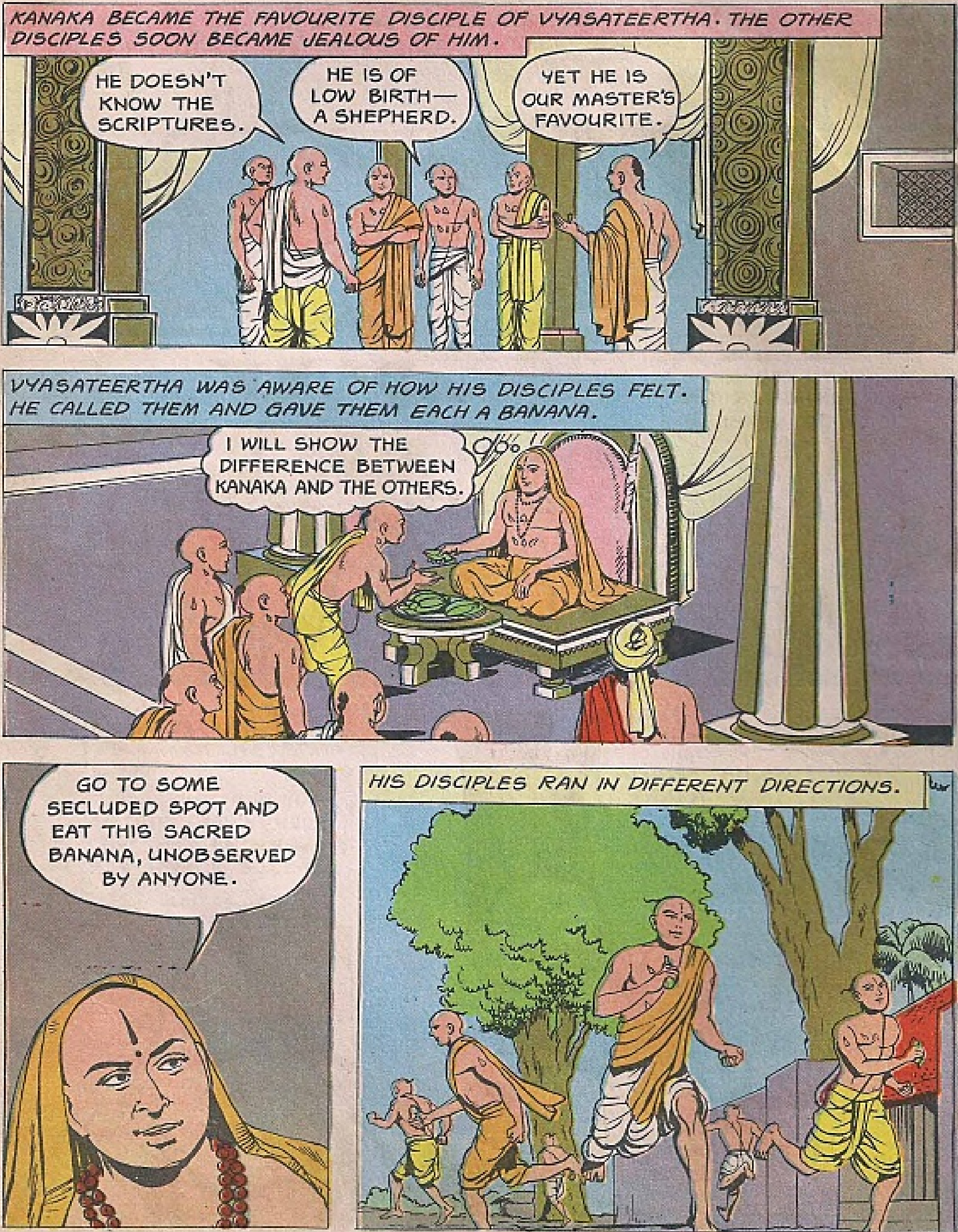
* GOD OF DEATH


HERE IS THE BUFFALO INVOKED BY THE MANTRA. WHAT WOULD YOU LIRE HIM TO DO?
GET YOUR BUFFALO TO REMOVE THE ROCK WHICH IS HINDERING OUR WORK.
O VEHICLE OF YAMA, PLEASE FULFIL THE WISH OF THE MASTER.
SOME DAYS LATER —
THANKS TO KANAKA, THE TANK HAS BEEN COMPLETED.
FAITH CAN MOVE EVEN MOUNTAINS! BLESSED IS KANAKA.



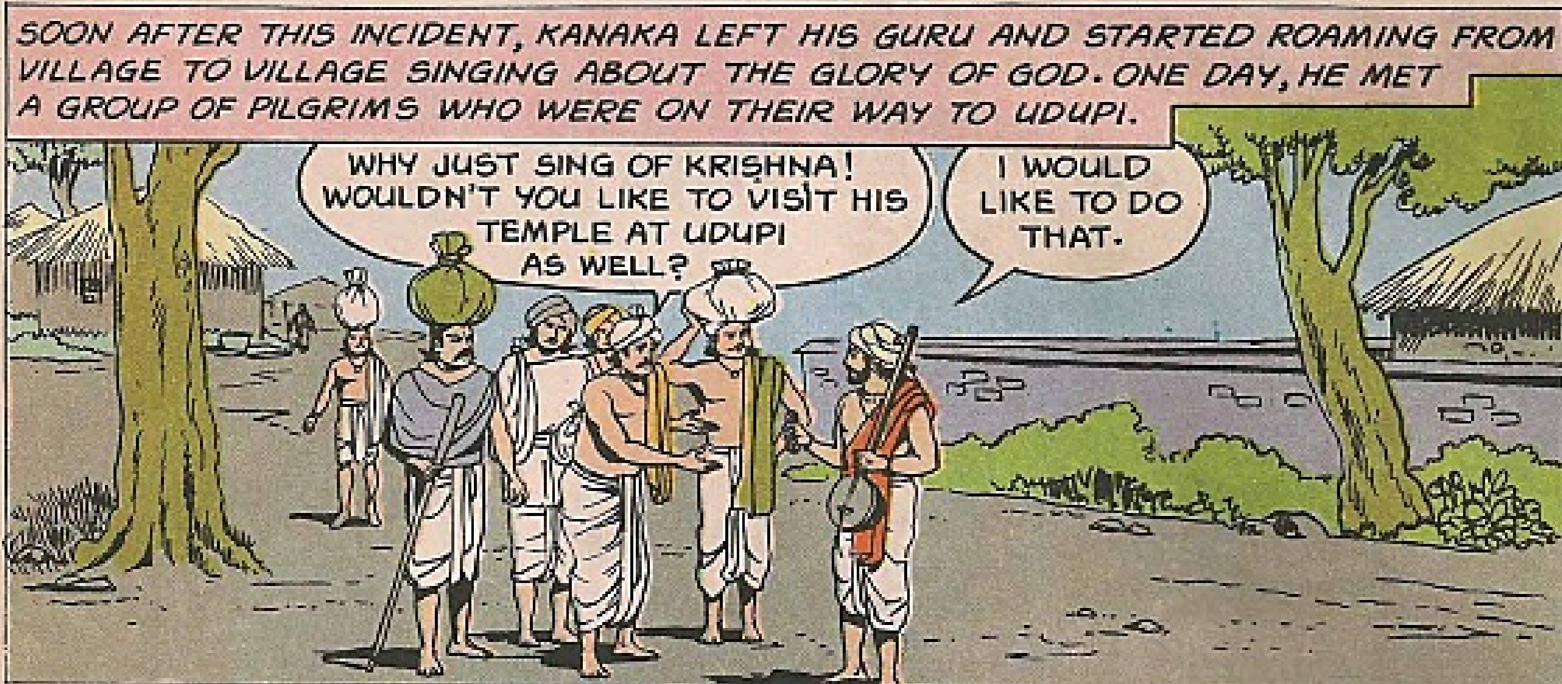
* UNLEAVENED BREAD

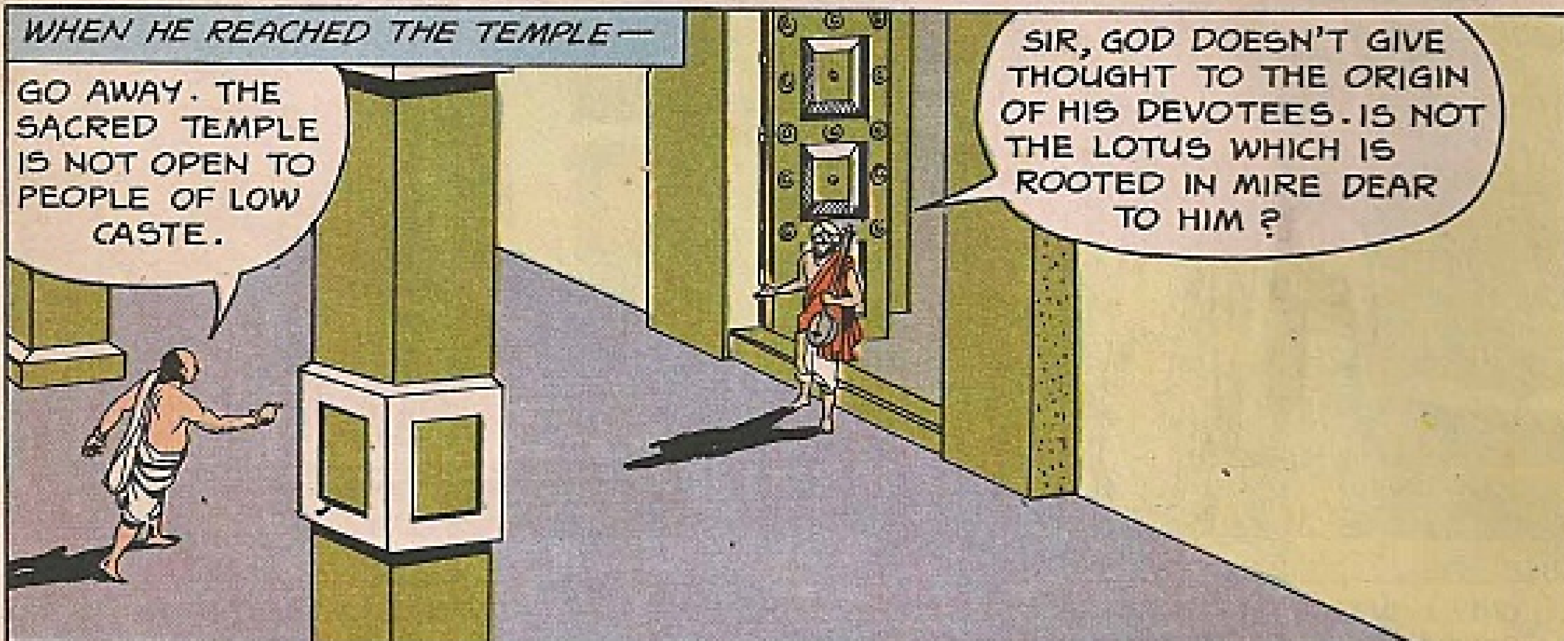

KANAKA RAN AFTER THE DOG, WHILE THE PEOPLE ON THE STREET WATCHED THE STRANGE SIGHT.
COME BACK AND TAKE THIS.
WHY DID YOU RUN AFTER THE DOG, KANAKA?
GOD CAME TO MY HOUSE, AND WENT AWAY WITHOUT ACCEPTING THE ROTI.
HA, HA!
HA, HA! KANAKA CALLS A DOG, GOD.
HE IS MAD.
BUT VYASATEERTHA UNDERSTOOD.
KANAKA SEES GOD EVERYWHERE AND IN EVERYTHING. HE IS A TRUE WORSHIPPER.



KANAKA BECAME THE FAVOURITE DISCIPLE OF VYASATEERTHA. THE OTHER DISCIPLES SOON BECAME JEALOUS OF HIM.
HE DOESN'T KNOW THE SCRIPTURES.
HE IS OF LOW BIRTH— A SHEPHERD.
YET HE IS OUR MASTER'S FAVOURITE.
VYASATEERTHA WAS AWARE OF HOW HIS DISCIPLES FELT. HE CALLED THEM AND GAVE THEM EACH A BANANA.
I WILL SHOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KANAKA AND THE OTHERS.
GO TO SOME SECLUDED SPOT AND EAT THIS SACRED BANANA, UNOBSERVED BY ANYONE.
HIS DISCIPLES RAN IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS.


I AM SURE, NOBODY CAN SEE ME EATING HERE.
AH, A GOOD PLACE! I WILL HIDE MYSELF IN THE HAY AND EAT!
AFTER EATING THE BANANAS, EACH ONE CAME BACK TO THE MASTER.
WE HAVE OBEYED YOUR ORDER, MASTER.
GOOD. BUT WHERE IS KANAKA? COME FORWARD, KANAKA.
WHY HAVEN'T YOU EATEN THE BANANA YET?
HOW CAN I EAT THE BANANA UNOBSERVED BY GOD? HE IS EVERYWHERE.
YOU SEE! FOR KANAKA, GOD IS NOT JUST A NAME TO BE INVOKED IN PRAYERS. HE IS REAL AND IS ALWAYS PRESENT.

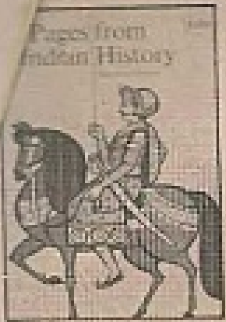

SOON AFTER THIS INCIDENT, KANAKA LEFT HIS GURU AND STARTED ROAMING FROM VILLAGE TO VILLAGE SINGING ABOUT THE GLORY OF GOD. ONE DAY, HE MET A GROUP OF PILGRIMS WHO WERE ON THEIR WAY TO UDUPI.
WHY JUST SING OF KRISHNA! WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO VISIT HIS TEMPLE AT UDUPI AS WELL?
I WOULD LIKE TO DO THAT.


WHEN HE REACHED THE TEMPLE —
GO AWAY. THE SACRED TEMPLE IS NOT OPEN TO PEOPLE OF LOW CASTE.
SIR, GOD DOESN'T GIVE THOUGHT TO THE ORIGIN OF HIS DEVOTEES. IS NOT THE LOTUS WHICH IS ROOTED IN MIRE DEAR TO HIM?


HOW DARE YOU ARGUE WITH ME? I WILL HAVE YOU BEATEN!



* HEAD OF A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION

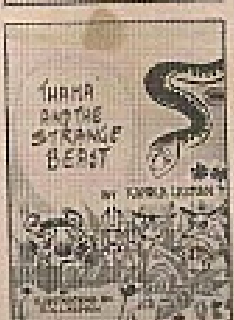












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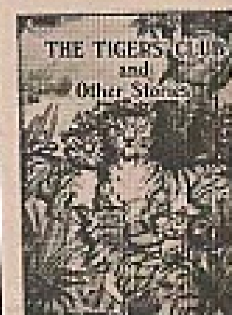
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